

SPOTS & STRIPES

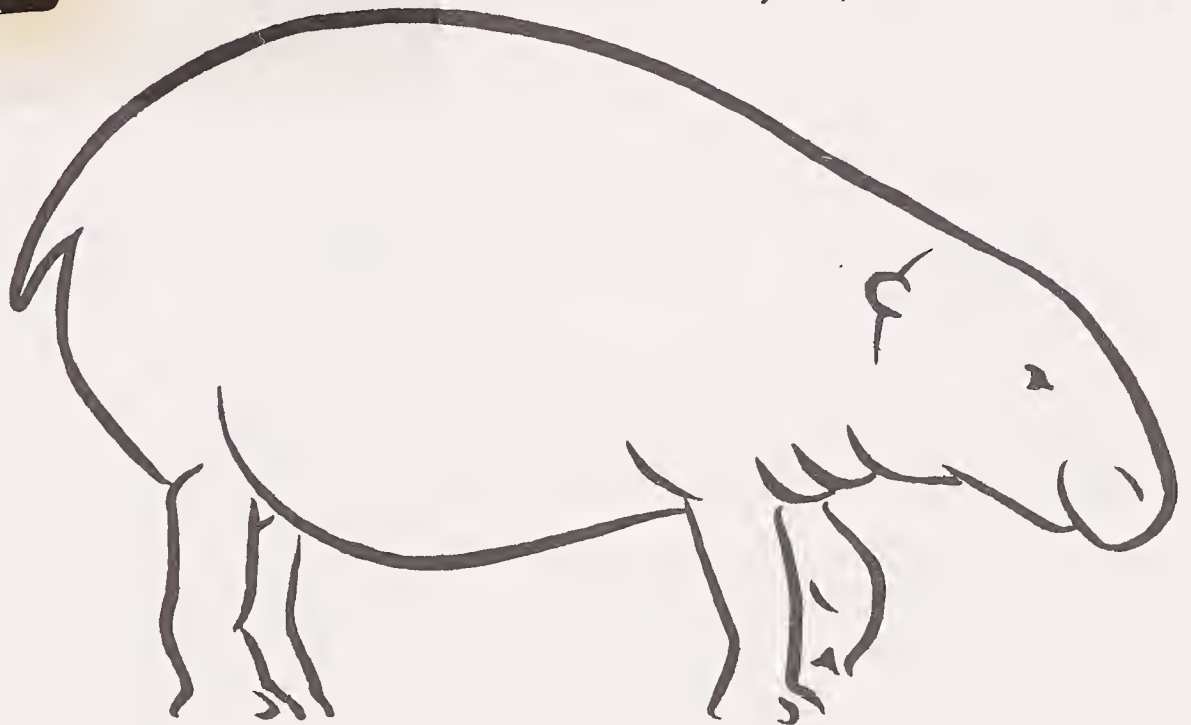


FONZ



Vol. 2, No. 2

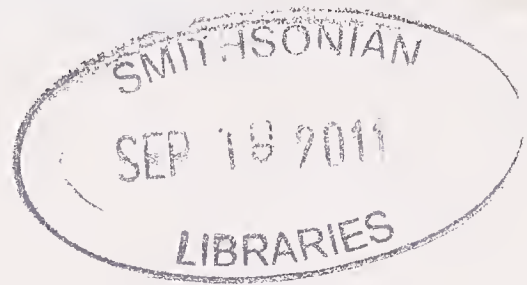
June, 1965



THE GUMDROPS AND THE GREEKS

Thirty-eight years ago the National Zoological Park welcomed Billy, its first pygmy hippopotamus. He arrived as a gift from Harvey Firestone, Sr., to Calvin Coolidge. Three years later a mate, Hannah, arrived, and a long, eventful history of hippos began which has brought fame to our Zoo for its record in breeding and rearing these scarce Liberian creatures. Today there is a line of hippos all named "Gumdrop" and another line named for letters of the Greek alphabet. It takes an old zoo pro to sort them out. One small visiting child this May didn't try. "What is a Zeta?" she puzzled loudly before shoving along.

The pygmy hippopotamus (*Choeropsis liberiensis*) is small only in comparison with its multi-ton and -- not to belittle them -- commoner cousin. Individual pygmies, dense and heavier than they appear, reach respectable weights of over 400 pounds. They are more solitary in habit than the gregarious common hippo. No lolling about in rivers, back to back and cheek by jowl with the massive masses.



Published by

THE FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL ZOO

3333 CONN. AVE. WASHINGTON, D. C. EM 3 2207

Instead, in the wild, they follow obscure and secret paths through dense and sometimes nearly impenetrable rain forest, never far from rivers or swamp-land of Liberia. Because their haunts are remote and difficult to reach the pygmy hippo was one of the last African mammals to be described. The large common hippo, dweller of the Nile and most of Africa's major rivers, had been known to the world since ancient times, but the pygmy remained a mystery animal until the latter part of the 19th century. Many questions still remain unanswered about its life and habits. In 1912 the first known zoo specimen reached Dublin but died shortly afterward. Securing the animals for collections remained difficult even when industrial development opened more and more of Liberia. The dense steaming rain forests resented intrusion.

In the 1930's, back in Washington, Billy and Hannah had brought the patter of small heavyweight feet with pleasing frequency, but Director William Mann hoped for fresh breeding stock to establish new bloodlines. At last came a way. In 1940, the Smithsonian-Firestone expedition left New York bound for Liberia to collect animals. Ralph Norris, who only recently retired from his post as head keeper of the National Zoological Park, accompanied the group, which was led by Dr. Mann. Today he recalls vividly each detail of the adventurous and rugged months.

Once established in Liberia's interior, travel continued on foot, often through tropical wilderness known only to Africans. Specimens of various animals were collected, but for a while no hippos. Natives of the interior had ways of trapping them since the animal's flesh was valued for food, but they could not be depended upon to deliver the creatures healthy and unharmed. Therefore, when local natives one day reported with great excitement that a fine pygmy hippo had been captured three or four days' march away, the task of leading an expedition to bring the animal back alive fell to Ralph Norris. Dr. and Mrs. Mann were away off on another leg of the expedition. Mr. Norris wasted no time. Rounding up supplies and 85 porters he struck out, his common sense, pluck and well-known ingenuity substituting for "bush" experience. The safari worked its way into rain forest country so thick they were sometimes forced to move ahead on hands and knees. The torrential rains of tropical Liberia alternated with steaming heat. At night they slung hammocks between trees. Once Norris suffered a snake bite but he waves the incident aside as it was "only a little python." And he secured his hippo. Seven days later the party marched back into their base headquarters with a healthy female, her heft borne on the shoulders of eight porters. This was Matilda, who was to become one of the Zoo's star mothers. She is still with us today.

The Smithsonian-Firestone expedition collected a large and valuable collection aside from two pygmy hippos. Capture was only a small part of the job. Protecting the precious cargo and transporting it to the coast, then aboard the waiting freighter -- these tasks demanded nerve, skill and hard work. Driver ants, whose invading armies could savagely destroy all in their path, were a constant threat. Cages were kept on top of tables or sawhorses, the legs of which stood in gallon cans of crude oil to repel the ants. Guards were posted around the clock. Then there was the harrowing job of loading live cargo aboard the ship at Monrovia, where rough breakers lashed a rocky shore without harbor. Each animal, including the hippos, had to be ferried from shore to freighter aboard wave-tossed surf boats. The voyage to Norfolk took 23 days, during which the large load of animals had to be tended constantly, their quarters cleaned, their thirsts and hungers satisfied, their bruises salved. Expedition members slept little. When at last the ship docked, however, only a single small crocodile had been lost.

Billy and Hannah produced 15 offspring. Billy and Matilda had eight, with a remarkably high record of survival. This early line of pygmy hippo youngsters all bore the whimsical name of Gumdrop. The tradition began long years ago when Dr. Mann overheard a youngster, delightedly peering at a newborn pygmy hippo, remarking loudly, "Oh ... it looks just like a gumdrop." The Gumdrop line, still a sort of aristocracy among the pygmy hippos here, has now given way to a series of hippos named for letters of the Greek alphabet.

Billy died in 1955 after more than a quarter of a century in the Zoo. Hannah followed three years later in 1958. Matilda, along with two of her daughters, Gumdrop Susan and Gumdrop Millie, seemed destined for a time to lead spinster-like lives and the tiny thump of tiny hippo feet no longer beguiled the visitors. Then, in 1960, President William V. S. Tubman of Liberia generously offered to donate a male pygmy hippopotamus of breeding age. The gift arrived in February of that year and was named Totota after the Liberian President's country estate.

Since Totota's arrival, one entire side of the large mammal house seems to have become maternity row for pygmy hippos. Matilda is once again a mother of many. The Greek alphabet line prospers, helped along by her daughters. Matilda's Alpha was followed by daughter Susan's Beta. Then came Millie's Gamma and Matilda's Delta. Keeper Sonny Stroman raised Susan's Epsilon on a bottle, taking the little animal home with him at night, getting her launched in life just in time to turn his attention to Millie's Zeta. On May 1 of this year, Theta arrived. She has been thriving, gaining weight at a healthy rate of between a pound and a pound and a half a day. Each morning keeper Stroman lifts her bulky little round form and puts her in her square aluminum bathtub for a thorough scrubdown. She stares with round and uncomprehending eyes at the beguiled public, then is free to trot about for a while between the cage row and the outer rail. Not all of the newborn baby hippos have lived, but the record of survival is outstandingly high. Many have been sent to enrich other zoos. Eight pygmy hippos remain at the National Zoological Park.

Keeper Stroman hints that there may soon be nine.

* * * * *

Joe Davis, our correspondent at the Bronx Zoo, reports that after reading in the last issue of Spots and Stripes about the romance between our two young gorillas, Tomoka and Femelle, he has one word of advice to us: "Watch the feeding of the girl gorilla. Remember that a fat Femelle is not a femme fatale."

* * * * *

Overheard at the Zoo:

Small girl entering the great flight room at the bird house: "Oh Mommy, look! The birds aren't tied up; they're flying all around!"

Small boy, contemplating Komodo dragons in the reptile house: "They don't spit fire the way they used to, do they, Daddy?"

* * * * *

SPRING BABIES

Spring, spring, rapturous spring! No wonder people get poetic. Being in the Zoo during the spring brings out the joie de vivre that has shivered inside us all during the winter. Spring is a time of beauty at the Zoo -- camellias and azaleas, tulips and pansies, budding trees and green grass all combining to delight the eye and caress the soul. Best of all it is a time of animal babies and cavern-mouthed birds. The turtles come out of hibernation and the emerging baby turtles are carefully counted and duly recorded. The waterfowl ponds become areas of delight with the ducklings obediently paddling along behind or beside their mothers.

The kookaburras have done it again! Our former breeding female died and it took many weeks of patient combining of birds to find one or more compatible pairs. Two baby kookaburras hatched in April and another pair is setting on another clutch of eggs.

During April and May a variety of babies were born:

Collared peccaries
Sea lion
Barbary apes
Reindeer
Prairie dogs
Dorcas gazelles
Pygmy hippopotamus

Nile hippopotamus
Ring-tailed lemur
Big-horn sheep
Genets
Civets
Hybrid guenon
Rhesus monkey

Mallard ducks
Wood ducks
Black-necked swans

Blue spiny lizards
Box turtles
Red-eared turtles

And there are more to come!

* * * * *

ZOO VISITORS

Clyde Hill, writing in the San Diego Zoonooz, makes an interesting comparison between the number of people visiting zoos and the number who attend major sports events. In 1964, major league baseball (excluding the World Series) drew 21,280,346 paid admissions. In 1964, the two football leagues drew 5,950,000 persons. The nation's zoos, however, draw far more people than these two sports combined. There are 19 zoos that count visitors by turnstile, and they reported 15,902,501 visitors in 1963. In addition there are 69 other zoos in the United States that have a combined estimated attendance close to 43 million. Adding the turnstile count to the estimated attendance gives an astonishing figure of 59 million "zoo fans."

Allowance must be made for possible errors in estimated attendance. But there are a number of aquariums and "theatre-aquariums" such as Marineland and the Miami Seaquarium which also draw large crowds and can be considered zoological gardens in a sense. It is probably safe to say that 60 million people in the United States visit a zoo every year.

* * * * *

GUESS WHAT -- FROM MADAGASCAR?

It is small -- hardly longer than a half-used pencil when it unrolls, and barely as big around as an India-rubber eraser; its head takes up almost a third of its body, and a lead-thin snout takes more than half the length of its head. Tiny pin-point black eyes sit well forward and to the side of its broad forehead; on the top-back of its head half-inch-long bristles stick straight up when irritated. Its major color is blackish-brown, with three yellow streaks running the length of its roundish back and one down over its forehead to its nose. At intervals, stiff yellow spines show through its coarse hair. It has well-defined stand-up ears and no apparent tail except for a knoblike protrusion at the end of its stubby bottom. It has four low-slung legs, five toes equipped with long claws on each foot, and it is a rare, burrowing insectivore from Madagascar. What is it?

It is a tenrec. In this case, it is the streaked tenrec (Hemicentetes semispinosus) -- some say the handsomest of the family Tenrecidae.

Now, another: It is relatively large -- about a foot and a half long from tip of snout to tailless rounded bottom and jugsized through the body; it is a uniform brownish-fawn in color, with no distinctive markings; it somewhat resembles a hedgehog, to which it is related; and it is a rare, nocturnal, burrowing insectivore from Madagascar (and the nearby Comoro Islands). What is it?

It is a tenrec again. This time, the so-called common tenrec (Tenrec ecaudatus), largest of the tenrecs and largest of all insectivores. Though lacking the handsome markings of its miniscule namesake, the common tenrec is otherwise a Brobdingnagian duplicate of its tiny, streaked cousin, whose lead-thin snout here gives way to a finger-sized, long, pink, wrinkly nose; whose almost invisible whiskers become distinctively inquisitive organs of sense and touch; and whose tiny pin-point eyes are enlarged to buttonholes of expressive curiosity.

In its native Madagascar (to which it is unique), the family Tenrecidae has specialized, and there are two main kinds: those with soft fur and those with spines. Of the soft-furred variety, there is the rice tenrec (short-tailed and rat-sized), so called because its mole-like burrowing activities do extensive damage to the local rice crops; there is the marsh tenrec (also rat-sized), whose broadly webbed feet help it hunt water insects; there is the pygmy tenrec, who is the smallest of all tenrecs and resembles a shrew; and there is the long-tailed tenrec, whose six-inch tail is two-thirds again the size of its body, whose hind feet are relatively large, and whose jumping ability is phenomenal.

Of the four types of spiny tenrec, the National Zoo has acquired six each of the common and streaked varieties. Forest-dwellers who live in holes and usually venture forth in their search for insects only after nightfall, they now call the small mammal house home. There, nocturnal habits have swiftly adjusted to local conditions. Food is food, whatever time it arrives, and from immobile curved balls of nothingness all blobbed together in their sleeping boxes, six tiny noses and six large ones awake, survey, ascertain, and all but fall out of their cages in eager anticipation. Dietary preferences have also undergone change -- the food toward which they advance with such evident relish is a mixture of bananas, ground meat, pablum, condensed milk, and-- egg noodles.

Nocturnal or diurnal? Insectivore or omnivore? All this reporter knows is that, at 10.30 a. m., even without the stimulus of food, she was deluged by active tenrecs, large and small. Cold, wet noses, miniscule or largely meaningful, sniffed hand and notes; tiny, delicate or trompingly deliberate feet made tracks across wet ink. And, heard from the other side of the glass-fronted cages, "What are they, anyway? Look like long-nosed rats. No, hedgehogs. No, they're anteaters!"

Whatever they appear to be, the National Zoo's twelve tenrecs are thriving since their first introduction April 13. They came to us from Johns Hopkins University, where they were being used in echo-location and orientation experiments, and they are believed to be among the few members of the family Tenrecidae in collections today.

Somewhere amongst the twelve, hopefully, there are several pair. One pair is, in fact, known -- two later introductions of the common tenrec to the original four. These tended to be snappishly aggressive and possessive upon first arrival and managed to drive the original four out of bed and box and into the water tank. But gradually the outcasts repossessed, compromise was reached, and all six can now be seen living, eating, sleeping and Tenrecing in complete harmony.

* * * * *

OLD FRIENDS, NEW FACES AND SUCH

Next in the series of thumbnail sketches (and it is going to take two thumbs!) is Marion P. McCrane. Marion graduated from Penn State in 1953, and went to work in a laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania. The following year she moved to the Bronx Zoo, where she remained until 1960 in their educational department. Much of her work there consisted of taking Zoo animals to public schools and giving lectures to the children, an account of which she published in the National Geographic Magazine in November 1956. Leaving the New York Zoo, she came to Washington and did editorial work for the American Institute of Biological Sciences, and later for the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology. Her heart, however, had long been given to live animals, and in April 1962 she joined the National Zoo as head of the department of education and information. Her first job was to start a labeling program for the Zoo, and this she has carried out -- and is still carrying out -- with spectacular success. A small (105 pounds) bundle of energy she can be found anywhere in the Zoo: directing the sign laboratory in the basement of the elephant house, escorting foreign scientists around the Zoo, cooperating with WETA on educational TV programs, shepherding a group of handicapped children through the animal houses, taking "aerial" photographs from the heights of the sky bucket, or, wearing crash helmet and high heels, inspecting the tunnel under Administration Hill. For nearly a year she has been foster mother to a two-toed sloth named Mary Jane that goes where Marion goes, and all through the winter was kept warm inside Marion's coat or sweater. The Boss calls her Pixie or Twinkletoes. Everybody else calls her Our Girl Friday -- Marion McCrane, Zoologist.

* * * * *

April 15, 1965 was a black day for the National Zoological Park. Associate Director J. Lear Grimmer resigned. Professionally, it's bad enough losing a key staff member of Mr. Grimmer's rare ability and talents, but what's even worse, many of us are losing a close friend, right arm, bolsterer of spirits, and favorite personality. To say that we miss him is totally inadequate. "Losing", though, is perhaps not really the right word, for Lear Grimmer has been named Honorary Collaborator of the Smithsonian Institution. True, he lost his heart to a tropical paradise called Grand Cayman in the British West Indies and will be down there often, but we demand to see him -- lots!

The absence of an Associate Director necessitated some personnel reorganization and additions to fill the gaping hole, and somehow the Zoo's old Administrative Building just had to expand to accomodate new faces. And, miraculously, so it did, under the capable hands of Zoo carpenters, plumbers, plasterers and painters. Dr. Reed (top sardine) and "family", Mrs. Maser and Mrs. Mann, now reside in a new office complex (the renovated old storeroom and kitchen) on the second floor north, -- the opposite end of the building from the former director's office, which now houses Education - Information and the Library.

Chief Engineer Frank Maloney now has his office in the Administration Building, and temporarily so does an important new employee, Personnel Management Specialist Robert Artis. Mr. Artis came to the Zoo from General Services Administration, where he worked for a year as Placement Specialist, then as executive secretary of the Board of Civil Service Examiners for two years, and later as Classification Specialist. He comes from Illinois, is married and has two almost teen-aged sons, Bobby and Johnny. His hobbies are bowling, fishing and raising chihuahuas -- which he hopes will be financially rewarding.

Kerry Muller, the new manager of the Bird Division, came to the National Zoological Park from California, where he had had seven years' experience in the San Diego Zoo. When he was a youngster, birds were his hobby; he kept, raised and imported many varieties. Later they became his profession. Kerry is a graduate of San Diego State, with a B. S. in zoology. He is married and has three children, Annette, Troy and Patrick. Among his many hobbies are fencing, skin diving, tropical fish, gardening, and raising show pigeons.

* * * * *

(The Washington Post, April 25, 1965: "Leonard, the baby gorilla at the Washington National Zoo, is not nuts. He's just not sure he's not people.")

Leonard never knew his Ma,
But loved his foster mother.
He thinks he's people, and what's more
That he's his keeper's brother.

On June 2 Leonard left for his new home at the Riverdale Zoo, Toronto, Canada. This was an exceptionally difficult decision since Leonard is the second gorilla born at the National Zoo, and the third zoo-born in the United States. Now that Tomoka has a mate, it is felt that the next group to develop is that of the orangutans. So in exchange for Leonard, the Zoo is receiving a 10-year-old male orangutan, a proven breeder, and with a little luck there should be young oranges within the next few years.

* * * * *

ZOO NIGHT

The annual Zoo Night of the Friends of the National Zoo will be held a little later in the summer. Dr. Reed has promised the Friends a preview of the spectacular new great outdoor flight cage. Original hopes were to open this at Easter time, but the customary delays have postponed the formal opening. In any case, the Friends will be the first to be admitted, and will be notified of the date for our evening meeting. Planting is now going on in the big aviary, and it will not be long before the transfer of birds to their new quarters will be begun.

FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL ZOO

Robert E. McLaughlin, President
 C. R. Gutermuth, Vice President

Luis F. Corea, Treasurer
 Mrs. Peter Grogan, Secretary

Board of Governors

Arthur W. Arundel
 Ralph E. Becker
 Monroe Bush
 Mrs. David S. Clark
 William Dawson
 Timothy V. A. Dillon
 Mark Evans
 Mrs. John G. Harlan, Jr.
 Dr. Malcolm C. Henderson

Max M. Kampelman
 Mrs. Cazenove Lee
 Richard K. Lyon
 John Perry
 William H. Press
 Mrs. L. Noble Robinson
 Judge Russell E. Train
 Gerald G. Wagner

Contributors to this issue of SPOTS AND STRIPES: Jocelyn Arundel, Jean McConville, Billie Hamlet, Marion McCrane. Editor: Lucile Q. Mann.
